

**Quīntus:** (*susurrat*) Arge, bone canis, venī hūc.

- 30 *Argus Quīntum audit; ad fenestram currit et lātrat. Flāvius ad fenestram festinat.*

**lātrat** barks

**Flāvius:** abī, male canis. quid facis? abī statim.

**abī** go away!

*Argus per fenestram salit et Quīntum salūtāt; deinde per lūdum currit et Horātiam quaerit. omnēs puerī surgunt et*

**salit** jumps

- 35 *Argum petunt. Flāvius dēspērat.*

**quaerit** looks for

**petunt** chase; **dēspērat** despairs

**Flāvius:** abīte, puerī. vōs dīmittō. tū, Quīnte, dūc illum canem ē lūdō.

**vōs** (acc.) you; **dūc** lead! take!

## HOMER AND THE ILIAD – I

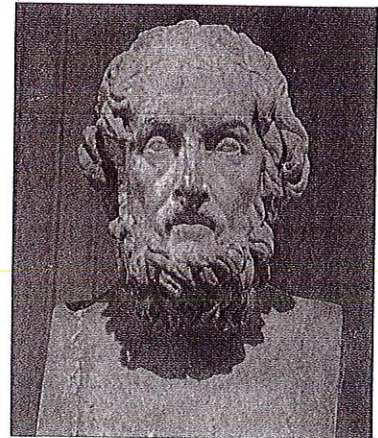
Besides reading, writing and arithmetic, children would learn both from their parents and from their teachers the stories of Greece and Rome which were part of the common culture of the ancient world. The most powerful of these focused on the sack of Troy by the Greeks; and this cycle of stories was linked to Rome, since the Romans believed that their ancestors were Trojans who had escaped when Troy was taken.

This story had been told in Greek by the first and some would say the greatest poet of Western literature. He probably lived before 700 BC and his name was Homer. We know almost nothing about him. He came from Ionia in what is now western Turkey, and according to tradition he was blind. He may have composed both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the great poems which have come down to us under his name, but even that is uncertain. The *Iliad* is the tragic story of the terrible events which led up to the sack of Troy, a city in north-west Turkey, by the Greeks. The *Odyssey* tells of Odysseus' return from Troy to Greece and his recovery of his kingdom, and the adventures and dangers he met in the process.

In this chapter the schoolmaster tells the story of the *Iliad*. We now summarize the events which come before the action of Homer's poem.

The gods held a great wedding feast to celebrate the marriage of Peleus and Thetis. The goddess Eris (Strife), however, had not been invited. Furious at this insult, she stormed into the hall where the feast was taking place and flung down a golden apple. Inscribed upon this were the words 'For the most beautiful'.

As Eris had planned, the apple was going to prove the cause of terrible troubles. The obvious candidates for the title of most beautiful goddess were Juno, Minerva and Venus. Understandably, none of the gods was prepared to make the decision between them. The judge would have to face the anger of the two losers, whichever of the three won! Jupiter therefore decided that a mortal must settle the matter, and his choice fell on



Homer



the Trojan prince Paris. He was extremely good-looking and seemed likely to be highly experienced in such matters.

So the goddesses flew to Mount Ida near Troy where Paris was tending his flocks. After he had overcome his astonishment and realized what was expected of him, all three of them tried to bribe him to give them the apple. Juno offered him a vast kingdom, Minerva promised him military glory, and Venus said that she would give him the most beautiful woman in the world. This was Helen, the wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta in Greece. Venus' offer seemed the most attractive to Paris and he presented the apple to her.

Paris now went to stay with Menelaus in Sparta. Here he and Helen fell in love with each other and they ran off back to Troy. Menelaus joined with his brother Agamemnon, king of Mycenae, to lead a huge expedition of Greeks against Troy in order to bring the faithless wife home again. Helen's face 'launched a thousand ships'.

But the war that took place around the walls of Troy did not go well for the Greeks. Homer's *Iliad* begins by telling of the disastrous quarrel which arose when King Agamemnon took from Achilles, the greatest of the Greek warriors, a slave girl who had been given to Achilles by the army. This was a devastating blow, not only to the emotions of Achilles, who was very fond of the girl, but far more importantly to his honor. Horace's schoolmaster relates to his pupils the dreadful results of Agamemnon's foolish insult to Achilles.

*If you had been in Paris' position, which choice would you have made?*

Troy

